



FrontLineSupervisor

Olympia 360.753.3260

A newsletter from the Employee Assistance Program

Seattle 206.281.6315

Spokane 509.482.3686

<http://hr.dop.wa.gov/eas.html>

■ **Can an EAP be helpful with an employee who appears egotistical and in denial about the nature of his or her personal problems?**

Employee assistance professionals specialize in interviewing techniques designed to help resistant employees see the value in resolving personal problems. One of these interviewing techniques is called “motivational counseling.” Both an art and science, it is a topic of extensive study within the helping professions. Most counselors understand some principles of motivational counseling, but employee assistance professionals specialize in these practice techniques. Motivational counseling and assessment techniques seek to uncover the nature of a personal problem that explains an employee’s performance issues, but also the path toward motivating the employee to resolve the problem based upon his or her healthy self-interest. Motivational counseling techniques are not always successful, of course, but their success has spurred the growth of EAPs for 30 years.

■ **My employee has an attendance problem and brings doctor’s notes to explain his absences. Frankly, I think they are fakes. Can I call the doctor’s office and verify their authenticity? And, if they are falsified, should I refer the employee to the EAP?**

There are steps you can take to verify the authenticity of the doctor’s notes, but you should first discuss this situation with your human resources consultant. He or she will guide you in what to do based upon the extent of the absenteeism problem, past precedents the organization has established, and procedures it uses for verification of medical certifications, in accordance with your bargaining agreement. Several important federal laws govern medical and personal privacy, and they must be considered in the process of dealing with medical matters. You can make a supervisor referral of your employee to the EAP based upon the attendance problem. It’s better not to wait. The attendance pattern is burdensome for the organization. The EAP is also available as a consultant to you in working to resolve the attendance problem and advising on the referral process.

■ **Although employee assistance professionals aren’t attorneys, I bet they play a role in reducing the risk of legal problems in our company. For example,**

Although employee assistance research has historically focused on measurable factors like reduced turnover, many other types of reduced behavioral risks are afforded to organizations by EAPs, and many are associated with reduced legal risk. Examples include: 1) Helping supervisors follow proper procedures in managing troubled employees. 2) Guidance in constructing proper documentation. 3) Instruction in how to handle related records and maintaining confidentiality. 4) Encouraging regular performance reviews in managing employees. 5) Directing troubled employees to the

since being trained by the EAP, my documentation is a lot better. Am I right?

proper department in the organization when they present confidential complaints about harassment or discrimination. 6) Consultative assistance to supervisors to prevent improper responses to troubled employees' behavior. 7) Consulting on the resolution of conflict before it is followed by violence. Most organizations recognize that cost-benefits of EAPs lie in the prevention of financial losses associated with workplace incidents that never occurred. Coordination with your human resource consultant and the EAP helps you cover the bases.

■ **The supervisor duty I dislike most is confronting employees with performance problems. Defensiveness seems to be one thing I can always count on from employees. Do you have any tips on reducing defensiveness in confrontations?**

Because defensiveness can be a potential challenge in any corrective interview, supervisors must use “tools” to make interviews less difficult. These tools are associated with language and attitude. For example, one helpful tip is called the “help me understand” approach. Use “help me understand” statements to set a positive, non-threatening tone when confronting employees. Example: “Help me understand the problems you are having getting your work done by the date we agreed.” Your attitude toward the employee is also an important tool. If you are convinced a confrontation will fail to produce a positive result, it will show from the moment you speak. An employee should never be able to tell from your attitude that you have lost faith in his or her ability to bounce back.

■ **My employee accuses staff of being jealous of her looks and personality, ruining her personal relationships, stealing articles of clothing from her, and sneaking inside her desk. She says the EAP advises her about how to “handle us.” Is she mentally ill?**

Although your employee's behavior sounds disruptive, it is not possible to determine her mental health state with the information you have provided. Document her conduct and performance issues, decide upon corrective measures, and make a supervisor referral to the EAP. Your employee told you she is using the EAP as an advisor, but the information she gave you may not be accurate. A supervisor referral can prompt the EAP to obtain a release to verify attendance and follow-through with its recommendations. The employee management issue you face is not unusual for EAPs. If the EAP is working with your employee, information you provide will aid it greatly in assisting her because the employee assistance professional will finally obtain the other half of the assessment picture.

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